

OBSERVATIONS ON THE SHILLUK OF THE UPPER NILE

further evidence, that such offences were treated as private delicts in the past, though nowadays, through the influence of the Government, penal sanctions may be applied.

Witchcraft

The Dinka and Nuer tell us that witches and other anti-social persons were sometimes dispatched by their victims or their kinsmen with the tacit consent of the community. Acts of homicide against persons whose actions threatened the integrity of the community were either not subject to restitutory sanctions at all, or the compensation demanded by their kinsmen was on a much reduced scale.¹ A similar attitude towards witches is to be found among the Shilluk, but again without the support of actual examples.

In the published literature there are references to persons described variously as witches, sorcerers, magicians, medicine-men, and possessors of the evil eye,² and their activities and methods are described, but there are few references to the way in which they were treated. The sanction applied to witchcraft is normally counter-magic consciously applied by the victim.

Hofmayr speaks of 'the *jal yat*, the evil-doer, his aim in life is to do harm, both to life and to property, either by natural means or others,' and adds that 'the *jal yat* works in the dark, but if he is caught, he will be severely punished. Often he is handed over to the people who kill him.' Hofmayr also speaks of the 'poison mixer' (again *jal yat*) who 'is hardly ever discovered. If he is caught, the people will lynch him on the spot and his relations will have to leave the district.'³ Another passage mentions that the compensation for killing a person possessing the evil eye is only four head of cattle instead of ten. These references, supported by what the Shilluk have told me, suggest an attitude similar to that found among the Nuer and Dinka.

It might be expected that, if there were any greater development of concepts of public law, and if the *reth* performed formal judicial and executive functions, acts of this sort would be subject not to merely private retaliation with the consent of the community, but rather to repressive sanctions applied by the *reth* or his representatives. In fact there is no evidence of this. It may be noted in this connexion that there are instances recorded during the last thirty years of attempts to introduce alien cults which would clearly be subversive of the ritual status of the *reth* and, through him, of the religious foundations of Shilluk society. For this reason Shilluk who have openly practised the Dinka cult of Deng have been severely repressed.⁴ There is good reason to believe that such activities would have been punished by death in the past and they are, by their very nature, public delicts amounting to acts of treason.

CONCLUSIONS

Much of the evidence so far quoted is unreliable, mainly because the authors have recorded impressions rather than facts. My own conversations with the Shilluk on the subject have been limited and perfunctory, and for this reason cannot provide

¹ For example, the Nuer *ruoh* or Ghoul - see Howell and Lewis, 'Nuer Ghouls - a form of Witchcraft', *J.N.R.* xxviii, 1947.

² *qiwop*, magician, *jal yat*, sorcerer, *ywob*, possessor of the evil eye. There are many references to the

activities of such persons in Hofmayr, *Die Shilluk*. See also Oyler, D. S., 'The Evil Medicine Man', *J.N.R.*, 1930.

³ Hofmayr, *op. cit.*
⁴ See Willis, C. A., 'The Cult of Deng', *J.N.R.*, vol. xi, p. 195.

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648 had nothing to do except to warn the Shilluk that a *reth* chosen by violence would not be accepted by government.

643 During the interval between the death of a *reth* and the final installation of a successor the Shilluk lack, in a certain degree, their chief mediator with Nyikang and God, and the *reth-elcet* lacks certain attributes of divinity, which are bestowed upon him later by Nyikang. Both parties express this inadequacy by certain prohibitions on their behaviour, many of which, in the case of the *reth* at any rate, are not signs of mourning but signs of respect to Nyikang, as they endure till his installation, and do not in all cases cease with the wake of the deceased. It is forbidden for Shilluk to light grass fires (except perhaps
[688] along the drying marshes, by the river banks) between the death of one *reth* and the installation of his successor. Any offender is liable to a fine. There are two types of building among the Shilluk; walls
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643 are built from mud alone laid in circular layers, or else a framework of millet stalks is first erected and then packed with mud outside and in. The latter technique is regarded as inferior; the former is the royal or divine style of building. Fashoda is built like that, and all the shrines to Nyikang, *reths* and *ryireths* throughout the country.
[174] Men of substance also build their houses after this fashion, and it seems as if this may have been the original traditional form of Shilluk building, and the other form is looked upon as something foreign. This royal style of building is forbidden in the same way as the burning of grass. It is said that the prohibition upon this royal style of building is a sign of respect to Nyikang; "you must not build in Nyikang's style, while Nyikang's houses are down". Nyikang's houses are not
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[346] actually thrown down, except the great shrine of Fanyikang, but each shrine of Nyikang is rebuilt by each new *reth*, or should be; and there is a general feeling that there is a rebirth of the whole Nyikang tradition at the installation of a *reth*. During the period of the interregnum there is a general feeling that something has passed away from the Shilluk, and requires renewing by Nyikang's reappearance, and until Nyikang himself has come to renew his contact with the Shilluk the people mark the interval by abstaining from building in the way they associate with Nyikang. Building of the inferior style

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to lift. However the delay was quite simply explained. Nyikang was not ready. A hitch had occurred in finding the cloth for his body. (A new effigy of Nyikang is made for each *reth*, and on the death of a *reth* the old effigy is destroyed). Another delay was caused by the Ororo messengers sent from Fashoda to Akurwa to say that all was ready. They dawdled on the way. 643 778

On the 26th February "Nyikang" and "Dak" started on their way. First they must beat the bounds of Shilluk country proper, and they went to Moro, some five miles north of Kaka market. The procession was first observed in the section of "Thorr" just south of Kaka.

Nyikang and Dak are carried by men of the Kwanyikwom clan who live at Akurwa. They are surrounded by the youths of the Kwanyikwom carrying whips to drive away the inquisitive or profane. As Nyikang passes through a section of the Shilluk country, the men of the section escort him to their borders. Anyone who is beaten by the whips of the Kwanyikwom is said to be held to ransom until he pays a fine of a goat. There are various offences for which Nyikang penalizes people on the way. Nyikang's image is made from ostrich feathers and bamboo. It is therefore sacrilege for a Shilluk to be seen with an ostrich feather in his hair or carrying bamboo. The ritual of burial must be completed for all who have recently died. Nyikang must not pass anything unclean. In Nyikang's presence Shilluk must not present a warlike appearance. A man carrying a spear may not have a shield as well, and a man with a shield is only allowed a millet stalk. Nyikang advances with his son Dak at a loping trot of about 6 m.p.h. escorted by the Kwanyikwom and the men of the section through which he is passing. As he approaches a village the people dash out as if to ward him off, but quickly over-powered they soon join the procession. It is usual for gifts of a sheep or a goat to be presented to or exacted by Nyikang, and it was noticeable how all small stock and fowls were either shut up or driven away from the vicinity of Nyikang, for Nyikang has a right to anything he fancies. As Nyikang proceeds with Dak his son beside him, the escort chants 643 778 [481] [431]

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The same evening, outside the shrine of Nyikang some of the Kwa Nyikwom were gathered and busily engaged in the spiritual decontamination of persons who had obstructed the passage of Nyikang on his march to Fashoda. These persons had incurred the displeasure of Nyikang, and were in grave danger of their lives, unless steps were taken by the Kwa Nyikwom to remove the curse by rites of purification. The two parties concerned were seated about two yards apart. Each had a potsherd filled with smouldering grass in front of him. The attendant member of the Kwa Nyikwom cut off about half an inch of the hippo whip he carried and burnt it in the embers. His victim then blew upon the embers, which burst into flame, but were extinguished with water. The ashes were removed and the victim anointed with them on the back, chest, palms and soles. For this privilege each handed over a chicken and a spear as a fine for a breach of traditional observance in hindering the path of Nyikang.

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THE MAKING OF NEW FIRE AT FASHODA.

Just before dusk a group of Ororo and Kwareth began to gather near one of the wind-screens at the side of the temporary camp. All fires in Fashoda had been extinguished. A wooden club of no special origin or sanctity was brought and the shaft of a spear detached from the blade. A small hole was pierced in the handle of the club, and the spearshaft sharpened to fit this hole. The ritual kindling of fire which followed was no different from the normal method of fire-making with sticks, except that several persons co-operated in twirling the shaft. One man held the club firmly to the ground, while each man twirled the shaft in turn, the hands of the second starting at the top of the shaft, as soon as the first man's hands had reached the middle. A continuous twirling motion was thus maintained. The tinder in the hole soon began to smoulder and grass was added and in a short time burst into flames. The fact that no difficulty had been encountered and that the fire had been kindled quickly was regarded as a good omen. Men and women who had been sitting nearby came up to light their pipes from the fire, and embers were carried off in all directions to relight the fires of Fashoda. The making of the new fire was the day of the enthronement of the Aeth. - Analyst

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Meanwhile the army of the *reth* was gathering below Aturwic, and the *reth*, dressed in white with a Mrs. Gray skin draped round him and five ivory bracelets on each arm, descended among them. Armed with millet stalks, they began to move slowly forwards in a threatening manner towards the army of Nyikang. When only a hundred yards separated them, a violent argument broke out about the bull, which should have been provided for the occasion to be tied down and walked over by the combatants (Note 21). Both parties retired and the *reth* went up on to the mound again, where he could be seen standing at the central entrance, a long millet stalk in his hand. Nyikang, Dak, and Cal retreated to a point just outside the shrine. After a long delay the bull was brought and placed between the two armies, who advanced, and the *reth* in front of his army walked forward to throw the first spear (millet stalk), which fell at the feet of Dak. Millet stalks began to fly, and in the general mêlée, the *reth* rushed forward with a small escort and wrested *nyakwer* from Nyikang, and hustled her away through the ranks of his warriors up to the mound behind them. Three furious counter-attacks followed by the Kwa Nyikwom, who dashed forward waving and whirling their ropes and whips. Finally, with Nyikang and Dak and Cal, at their head, they reached the bottom of the mound and went up to the huts on top. Shortly afterwards Nyikang and Dak descended from the mound. It was said that all hostility between Nyikang and the *reth* was now at an end, and that Nyikang had accepted him as his successor. Then they started on a tour of all the huts in Fashoda. This was considered an inspection of the houses, and those sections of Shilluk who are traditionally called upon to repair them were fined by Nyikang if they had not done so. The fines were one head of cattle each, and one chief was fined for initiating a song, the privilege of the Kwa Nyikwom. This part of the ceremonies was taken lightheartedly, and the victims subjected to much witticism.

Nyikang, Dak and Cal then retired to the shrine. They took no further part in the ceremonies and did not appear in public until

he accepts, and we are informed that one cow, one bull and five spears ²⁰² have been offered and taken. Further I was told that the messengers carry ⁶⁴³ straws symbolical of the above offers (the common practice of Shilluk accounting), but this I cannot vouch for, as we could not see it. When the amount has been fixed, Nyakang appeared to advance steadily and rapidly, only making one sharp rectangular turn in our direction, and as I understood that Nyakang's people could hold to ransom (in cows) any one whom ^[688] they caught, I made a slight alteration in my position.

At this moment from the side some seventy or eighty of the Ret's wives ⁶⁴³ came dancing towards Nyakang's army holding their hands out palm up ^[644] wards and chanting *ya bin, ya bin* «come come».

The Ret's army now moves rapidly forward to the khor. I saw in front a small black bull, across which the Ret is said to step before crossing the khor. Tradition states it is important for the new Ret to cross this khor dryshod. As there was still water there, Faliti was taken across in his ^[501] toror (Shilluk boat), but owing to the crowd I could not see this. Just as the army gets to the khor, there is a sudden headlong flight by every one, due to the right possessed by the Kwa Mal of flogging any one that tarries or delays crossing the khor with the Ret. The Kwa Mal apparently used their whips with good effect, and soon the whole army was across. For this service Faliti gives the black bull to the Kwa Mal.

I could not distinguish Faliti, who in accordance with custom was dressed ^[291] in the ordinary Shilluk lau (cloth) and with a dingy red and yellow turban on his head. He was holding by his hand a tiny girl brought by the Kwa Okel ⁽¹⁾. In front of him came the people of Kwa Okel dragging forward a white bull tail first. The two armies then meet. Nyakang and

⁽¹⁾ Kwa Okel. Founded by people that Nyakang found in the Shilluk country. They ^[173] help in building the house of Nyakang when a king is crowned. They give one of their daughters to the king. The girl is known as Nya Kwer (*i. e.* a girl of the authorities, girl of taxes).

They are sometimes identified with Kwa Kelo — a section founded by Okelo a servant of Nyakang who taught the Shilluks how to prepare the mud for the Tuki (hearth stones). Another tradition states that Okelo was a Nuba, whose sister was married by Nyakang (*cf.* Westermann, p. 129 et seq., lists of clans made out by Rev. D. Oylor, of Doleib Hill).